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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: USG's PISCES Border Management System On Track For Removal Near End of February

REF: PRISTINA 461

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (U) This is an action cable. Please see paragraph eight.

Summary

12. (SBU) As we reported previously (reftel), the U.S. border management system PISCES is scheduled for removal early next year due to the installation of a new European funded border management system as soon as this February. However, Kosovo Police and the European Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) have appealed to the USG and EU organizations to keep PISCES installed since it is a powerful tool for investigation of serious crimes. The information technology (IT) company contracted by the European Commission to build the new border system believes it would not be difficult or expensive to make an interface to allow both systems to receive data, but they would need technical specifications about PISCES to accomplish this.

We believe the European Commission Liaison Office (ECLO) in Pristina would be willing to fund the changes if directed by Brussels. We believe it is in the United States' long-term interest to keep PISCES in place in Kosovo, but to accomplish this objective Washington would need to approve the sharing of sharing of PISCES technical specifications to permit the creation of an interface between it and the new EC system. In addition, the U.S. would need to either: a) fund the upgrade/changes directly, or b) approach EU institutions in Brussels and request that they instruct ECLO in Pristina to fund them. END SUMMARY

PISCES' Removal Will Hinder Investigations

13. (SBU) The USG border control system PISCES (Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System), in place at all but two of Kosovo's border crossing points (BCP), is scheduled for removal by the end of February 2010. It will be replaced by an Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) funded by the European Commission Liaison Office (ECLO). IBMS will use reference data from

the GOK passport and vehicle databases to check the validity of passports and vehicle registrations, and like PISCES, it will permit the Kosovo Border Police to check travelers against a "stop list" of wanted criminals and terrorists. Unlike PISCES, IBMS does not store traveler data due to European data privacy rules. The inability to archive this data denies both the Kosovo Police (KP) and EULEX a powerful investigatory tool, the ability to track travel patterns of criminal and terrorist targets.

Removal of PISCES Overlooked

14. (SBU) Apparently top management at both EULEX and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) did not realize until October 2009 that the tender ECLO released in the fall of 2008 calls for both the replacement of PISCES and the completion of the IBMS project by the end of 2009. When we mentioned the imminent removal of PISCES to Minister of Internal Affairs (MOIA) Pajaziti and the Head of the EULEX mission, Yves de Kermabon, both expressed surprise. Pajaziti wrote a letter to ECLO on October 26 asking that PISCES remain in place and de Kermabon appealed to Brussels for help in getting the Americans to keep PISCES. (Note: According to ECLO Head of Operations Kjartan Bjornsson, neither EULEX nor the MOIA have expressed misgivings on the removal of PISCES directly to ECLO. End note.)

Installation on Track

15. (SBU) According to reports from ProNet, the Kosovo IT firm which won the contract to produce IBMS, hardware for the central system (Border Police HQ) is currently being installed, including both servers and workstations. Once ECLO accepts the system, which

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ProNet believes will happen by the end of December, it will authorize ProNet to begin pilot tests with both IBMS and PISCES in parallel for two to four weeks at one site. At the conclusion of these tests, upon direction from ECLO and the MOIA, IBMS will be installed at all border crossings and PISCES will be removed. Installations could be completed by the end of February.

A Dual System is Possible, if the Will Exists

16. (SBU) ProNet Chief Technical Officer Armend Skeja on December 11 told us that he does not think it would be difficult to feed both systems with a single data input and estimated that work to facilitate such an arrangement would take about one month. According to Skeja, if he received the technical specifications of the data fields PISCES requires, he could explore several possible ways to connect the two systems. An AmCit IT expert who has worked with PISCES for several years suggested to us that PISCES could run on a central server with traveler data downloaded from the BCPs once per day. He added that he thought this could be done with no modifications to PISCES.

17. (SBU) Bjornsson, however, raised both political and technical concerns. ECLO could not support anything that would be contrary to EU law, and collecting traveler data, even if it was sent to another system, might constitute such a violation. Also, under IBMS, only passports of travelers fitting certain profiles would be scanned, possibly reducing the utility of such data to law enforcement agencies. Bjornsson said he would check with both EULEX and Brussels for guidance. He will also seek firmer estimates from ProNet of costs of a potential interface.

Comment and Action Request

18. (SBU) If ECLO gives ProNet the order, and ProNet has data specifications for what PISCES requires, we are told that both systems could run in parallel by the end of February. Access to PISCES data is clearly important to both the KP and EULEX, but it seems that neither side wants to admit that they were not paying attention when the decision was taken to remove it. Our impression

is that ECLO will fund a modification to IBMS to allow both systems to function in tandem if instructed by Brussels. We also believe -- with EULEX and the KP -- that the continued operation of the PICSES system in Kosovo is critical for successful prosecution of serious crimes like terrorism, trafficking in persons and organized crime. To accomplish this objective, we need Washington to permit us to share with ProNet the technical information necessary to allow it to connect IBMS and PISCES and to demarche Brussels on the importance of permitting the PISCES system to remain in place.

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